As India goes to polls beginning April 11, with an estimated 90 crore electorate (more than the combined population of Europe) we summarise the many untold facets.

First, India does fairly well in terms of voter turnout (66.4% in 2014), when compared with other countries. Second, the gap between male and female voters has progressively declined over the years and the gap had almost closed in 2014. Extrapolating assembly election voting patterns in states post 2014, we believe such high female turnout rate in elections might continue in 2019 also with increasing women empowerment. One proxy for such increasing women empowerment is the number of accounts that have been opened through Jan Dhan and Mudra schemes. States like Madhya Pradesh, where both Mudra & Jan Dhan accounts have been opened in very large numbers, have seen an increase of women turnout rate by 18% in state assembly polls compared to 2014 elections.

Third is the issue of women not registering themselves as voters. Comparing Census and Election Commission data we estimate that there might have been 1.24 crore missing women electorate at the time of 2014 elections in 10 states only. We believe all the stake holders should encourage, facilitate and promote women to get themselves registered as voters.

Fourth, the impact of socio political factors on voting. We find that mostly southern states (Kerala, AP, Tamil Nadu) and Northern states which have been home to agricultural revolution (Haryana & Punjab) have more conscious voters. Interestingly, voting patterns may be literacy agnostic.

Fifth, migration impacts voting. Our estimates of net migration once mapped with the voter turnout indicates states like UP, Bihar, Odisha, Rajasthan & J&K have net “out migration” and consequently low voter turnout rate. Steps might be initiated to bring this growing chunk of electorate back to the voting process by making suitable changes in the existing electoral regulations. This can be made effective by rigorously linking the Aadhar card with Voter Identity Card and implementing a system of Absentee Voting Procedure like in the US!
WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND WOMEN TURNOUT RATE

- If we look at the voter turnout rate among 28 major States from the 1971 parliamentary election to 2014 elections, the women turnout was almost similar in the states of Kerala, WB and Tripura. The States which are lagging in voter turnout rate are the ones where females have traditionally not been actively involved electorally for e.g., in Bihar, UP, MP, Maharashtra & J&K.

- However, this is changing. For example, one proxy for increasing women empowerment is the number of accounts which have been opened through Jan Dhan and Mudra schemes. There is now increasing evidence that Jan Dhan accounts are acting as a vehicle for remittances apart from others that is resulting in more and more women taking independent decisions. We estimated the state-wise women PMJDY & Mudra accounts by taking the national women % share, which is 73.6% for MUDRA and 53% for PMJDY. The results in the adjacent table are quite interesting and encouraging. In all the 10 States, women turnout rate, in the subsequent Assembly elections, has improved significantly (by an average of 10%) as compared to 2014 LS general elections. States like Madhya Pradesh, where both Mudra & Jan Dhan accounts have been opened in very large numbers, has seen an increase of women turnout rate by 18%. This indicates that women empowerment has led to increase in the women voting turnout percentage. Are we witnessing a more empowered India then?

HOWEVER MISSING WOMEN ELECTORATE MIGHT BE A CONCERN

- However, there is a point of concern. Comparing Census and Election commission data we estimated that there might have been 1.24 crore missing women electorate at the time of 2014 elections in 10 states only. We define missing women as one who are eligible to vote but are not yet registered themselves as voters. This is alarming since it means that approximately 1.24 crore women may not have exercised their constitutional right to vote in their state of domicile.

- So to improve the women turnout rate in India, all stake holders, starting from the Central Government, the Election Commission of India, the media as well as the civic society should encourage, facilitate and promote women to get themselves registered as voters.

ARE 543 SEATS ENOUGH TO REPRESENT 130 CRORE POPULATION?

- Since only 543 Lok Sabha constituencies represent 130 crore people in the country, it is time to take a look at the legal provisions on delimitation of parliamentary constituencies (till 2026) with a view to increase their number. This is crucial in order to rationalize population per seat (to properly cater to the needs of people and constituency) which is currently at 15.6 lakh per LS constituency. Even in the smaller countries like UK, Germany Italy France, etc., the number of elected representatives is higher than the strength of the Lok Sabha in India.

DO SOCIAL INDICATORS INFLUENCE VOTING PATTERNS?

- Of equal importance and hitherto unexplored in Indian elections are the socio-political factors like, population size, age, educational attainment, political interest and economic backwardness. We believe that these factors play a major role and over the years have been the major driving factors behind voter turnout rates.

- The Multi-dimensional Poverty Index (MPI) by Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative assigns values to Indian states based on deprivations that each person faced with respect to education, health and living standards. We ranked the states on the basis of MPI (states with highest MPI ranked as 1) and compared with rank assigned to states on the basis of voter turnout rate (with 1st rank assigned to state with highest voter turnout rate), and found out interesting patterns.
Certain northern states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand, with higher MPI have lower voter turnout. Interestingly, these states have low literacy (women) and per capita incomes. Further, most of the North-East and Eastern states have higher turnout rates and varied levels of poverty. However states including Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Tamil Nadu, Haryana and Punjab, have high voter turnout rate and lower level of deprivation. These states have higher per capita incomes than the national average and higher literacy (though Andhra Pradesh and Haryana have lower women literacy). Thus voting patterns may be literacy agnostic.

Mostly southern states and northern states which have been home to agricultural revolution have more conscious voters.

**HOW DOES MIGRATION IMPACT VOTING PATTERNS?**

In addition to this, another important aspect which leads to low turnout is inter state and intra-state migration of both male and female. Over the years, mostly male population have been migrating from one state to another due to various reasons like looking for better quality of life, employment, marriage and education which impact the overall voter turnout rate. Our estimates of net migration (in migration - out migration), once mapped with the percentage of voter turnout among major states, show states like UP, Bihar, Odisha, Rajasthan & J&K have net "out migration" and, consequently low voter turnout rate.

Additionally, the upwardly mobile youth population which moves out of its place of domicile in search of better job opportunities, also needs more focus. Steps might be initiated to bring this growing chunk of electorate back to the voting process by making suitable changes in the existing electoral regulations. We believe this can be made effective by rigorously linking the Aadhar Card with Voter Identity Card and introduce a system of Absentee Voting Procedure like in US!

For example, in US if one stays overseas, he is still eligible to vote through the FVAP.gov. For such, one needs to print, sign and mail in a form to local elections office where he is registered in the U.S, at least 30 days in advance of the general election. The person has option to get an electronic ballot (online) or a blank paper ballot in the mail. This is called an Absentee Voting Procedure.